

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

SB 563 (Valladares) – As Amended March 26, 2025

**SENATE VOTE:** 38-0

**SUBJECT:** State parks: Off-highway Motor Vehicle Recreation: grants: eligible applicants

**SUMMARY:** Makes special districts that employ peace officers eligible for grants and cooperative agreements with the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes State Parks to administer and manage the state park system, including state vehicular recreation areas, which provide off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation opportunities [Public Resources Code (PRC) § 501, § 5001 *et seq.*].
- 2) Requires the OHMVR Division to develop and implement a grant and cooperative agreement program (Grants Program) to support the planning, acquisition, development, maintenance, administration, operation, enforcement, restoration, and conservation of trails, trailheads, areas, and other facilities associated with the use of OHVs, and programs involving OHV safety or education [PRC § 5090.50 (a)].
- 3) Allows funds for grants and cooperative agreements to be awarded for operation, maintenance, acquisition, habitat restoration, law enforcement, education, and safety. Requires that funds be appropriated in accordance with specified percentages within specified categories [PRC § 5090.50 (b)].
  - a) Requires that 20% of grants and cooperative agreements are available for law enforcement and that 40% of that portion to be given to local law enforcement. Requires that a grant or cooperative agreement for law enforcement be proportionate to the OHV enforcement needs under that entity's jurisdiction.
  - b) Subjects law enforcement entities that receive funds through a grant or cooperative agreement to a financial and performance audit once every five years.
- 4) Specifies the eligible grant and cooperative agreement applicants [PRC § 5090.50 (c) (6)], are limited to:
  - a) Cities, counties, and districts that have approval to apply for grant funds;
  - b) State agencies for habitat restoration projects;
  - c) Federal agencies;
  - d) Federally and state recognized Native American tribes; and
  - e) Educational institutions, certified community conservation corps, resource conservation districts, and other eligible nonprofit organizations for grants for scientific research,

natural resource conservation activities, trail and facility maintenance, restoration, and programs involving OHV safety or education.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, “Unfortunately, current law does not allow special districts to apply for grants through the OHMVR grant program, even though many of them provide the same services as cities and counties to support enforcement, education, and resource protection in areas impacted by off-highway vehicle use. [This bill] would expand the list of eligible OHMVR grant program applicants to include the handful of special districts that employ peace officers. This will help these districts be better equipped to protect sensitive habitat, educate the public, and respond to illegal or unsafe off-highway vehicle use.”
- 2) **Background.** The Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Act of 2003 established the OHMVR Division within State Parks. The OHMVR Division is responsible for planning and acquiring land for state vehicular recreation areas—special units within the state park system designed for OHV use. In addition to this work, the OHMVR Division implements a Grants Program from revenues in the Off-Highway Vehicle Trust Fund (OHV Trust Fund). Statute specifies allotments for Grants Program funding across various purposes such as operation, maintenance, acquisition, habitat restoration, law enforcement, and education and safety. The OHV Trust Fund is also used to support the OHMVR Division and to conduct its other activities.

According to the OHMVR Division’s website, “the Grants Program is an annual program that provides for well managed [OHV] recreation within California by providing financial assistance to eligible agencies and organizations that develop, maintain, operate, expand, support, or contribute to well managed high-quality OHV recreation areas, roads and trails.” The Grants Program seeks “to responsibly maintain the wildlife, soils, and habitat of project areas in a manner that will sustain long-term OHV recreation for the enjoyment of all California.”

Since the Grant Program began in 1974, it has awarded more than \$833 million statewide to grant recipients. In 2024 alone, the Grant Program distributed \$30 million to fund 129 projects. Demand has exceeded available funding, as over \$40 million was requested by applicants according to the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee analysis. If this bill becomes law, it would take effect January 1, 2026—only a few weeks before the application window for the 2026 Grants Program is expected to open.

*Special Districts.* Special districts are local public agencies formed by communities to deliver specialized services within their boundaries. Special districts provide services that many cities and counties may not, such as water, sanitation, fire protection, parks, and airports. Not all special districts employ peace officers, and of those that do, only a portion would have OHV enforcement needs (e.g., recreation and park districts, community service districts).

Currently, cities, counties, and districts that have approval to apply for grant funds, amongst others, are eligible to apply for the Grant Program. Resource conservation districts, a type of

special district responsible for managing natural resource projects, are eligible to apply for habitat restoration grants through the Grant Program. However, other special districts are not considered eligible applicants despite providing the same services as many cities and counties. This bill allows special districts that employ peace officers to also be eligible Grant Program applicants.

- 3) **Arguments in support.** Hesperia Recreation and Park District (sponsor) write that expanding the eligibility of the Grant Program would “allow qualified special districts to seek funding for critical activities such as trail patrols, public education, habitat protection, and response to illegal or unsafe OHV use. These districts are often on the front lines of managing multi-use lands and serve areas where state and county resources are limited.” The California Association of Recreation and Park District and the California Special Districts Association concur that granting special districts access to this funding “will help close enforcement gaps, enhance the safety of recreational users, and ensure more sustainable stewardship of California’s public lands.”
- 4) **Related legislation.** SB 249 (Allen), Chapter 459, Statutes of 2017, extends the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Act indefinitely and makes various other changes to the Act including, amongst others, making certified community conservation corps and resource conservation districts eligible applicants to the Grant Program for scientific research, natural resource conservation activities, trail and facility maintenance, restoration, and programs involving off-highway motor vehicle safety or education.

#### **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

##### **Support**

Hesperia Recreation and Park District (sponsor)  
California Association of Recreation and Park Districts  
California Special Districts Association

##### **Opposition**

None on file

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